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ROYAL TOWN PLANNING INSTITUTE

INDEPENDENT CONSULTANTS NETWORK

ICN Steering Group Meeting

7 October 2021, 14.00 to 16.00

Remotely via MStTeams

1. Welcome, Introductions, Apologies for Absence

- Present: Deirdre Wells (ICN Chair), John Lynch, Helen Prangley, Anton Lang, Alyn Nicholls, Pete Lloyd, Jenny Divine (ICN Network Manager), Zoe MacGregor (RTPI Volunteer Project Co-ordinator)
- No apologies or absences

2. Invite to join the RTPI's Volunteer Advisory Group – Zoe MacGregor (RTPI Volunteer Project Coordinator)

- ZM provided the SG with information about the RTPI's volunteer strategy and the current opportunity to join a volunteers advisory group.
- DW queried what kind of volunteers the RTPI were looking for to join this advisory group.
- ZM confirmed any person who volunteers their time in any capacity for the good of the RTPI is welcome to put their name forward to join the Advisory Group.

3. Update on ICN membership

- JD confirmed that there are currently 820 active ICN members (up from 807 in February 2021), 240 of whom are also members of the ICN Discussion Forum (up from 226 in February 2021).

4. Minutes of the last meeting held on 5/02/2021 and matters arising *PAPER 1 Minutes 5 February 2021 ICN Steering Group Meeting*

a) Online Directory of Chartered Town Planners

- DW advised that she wrote a letter to Victoria Hills quite some time ago about this issue, but has not received a response.
- JD confirmed that there is support within the RTPI for a free online list of chartered members, and that there had been discussions about this forming part of the RTPI's GROWPLAN strategy. JD advised, however, that as this project was not originally planned into GROWPLAN, it may take some time to allocate resources for the project.
- JD advised that she has queried where this project sits within the GROWPLAN strategy and is awaiting a reply from colleagues.
- SG members voiced concern that this is not being given priority by the RTPI, despite it being a relatively simply exercise.
- SG members queried why it needs to sit within a strategy when all that is required is a PDF list of member names and their membership status.

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- b) MHCLG NPPF and National Model Design Code Consultation
- JD confirmed that HP and DW provided comments on this consultation, which JD provided to Max Tolley (RTPI England Policy Officer). Max confirmed that many of the comments aligned with those received from other RTPI members, and that he would take them into account when drafting the RTPI's consultation response (a copy of which can be found on the RTPI website).
 - SG members agreed that this was so long ago and a lot has happened since then, so no further discussion is necessary.
- c) Update re Steering Group Liaison with PINS
- DW advised that PINS have not responded to her last letter which set out the key issues and concerns of ICN members, but they have contacted her twice saying that they are willing to meet with the ICN again.
 - DW advised that she asked ICN members if they had any current issues they would like raised, but did not receive a response. DW queried if this is due to the current format of discussions, which only take place between PINS and ICN SG members. Previously up to 20 ICN members would meet with PINS representatives which encouraged more engagement within the network.
 - There was agreement amongst the SG that the issues are not new issues. The ICN has raised the same issues time and again with few positive resultant actions from PINS. It could be that the lack of response DW received was due to a sense of defeatism (or realism) amongst network members.
 - It was agreed that the ICN should continue to meet and have dialogue with PINS, but that future meetings should comprise a hybrid of SG members and other ICN members.
 - It was agreed that the SG should conduct a member survey to understand how many appeals are lodged by ICN members. This will hopefully provide PINS with an understanding about the significance of the Network.
 - PL queried if any action also needed to be taken in relation to the appeals bodies in the other nations.

Actions

- JD to continue to follow-up status of member list with colleagues
- DW to follow up on her letter to Victoria Hills
- AN to draft an ICN member appeals survey and circulate
- JD to circulate the member appeals survey around the ICN Network once it has been finalised
- PL will contact Roisin Willmott to query how much contact she has with the newly created PEDW and JD to put this same question to Craig McLaren regarding the DPEA

5. ICN Discussion Forum – feedback and user protocol

- DW advised that a Forum member had reported that a message he had sent to the Forum had been forwarded by someone to a case

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officer at a local council dealing with one of his applications. This message had then been forwarded back to him by the case officer in her reply to one of his emails.

- DW advised that when she checked the Forum User Protocol there was nothing in there that specifically prohibited Forum members sharing messages beyond the forum.
- It was agreed that the Forum User Protocol should be updated to include the following additional points:
 - Forum messages are to be treated as confidential by all Forum members. Under no circumstances are Forum messages to be printed, copied, or forwarded for the purpose of sharing with any individual, organisation or company external to the Forum.
 - Should a Forum member decide to unsubscribe from the Forum or if a Forum member is removed from the Forum for any reason, that Forum member must make every effort to delete and/or destroy all Forum messages they have received into their email inbox, including any digital or hardcopies they have stored in any location or on any device, within 7 days of their removal/un-subscription from the Forum. Any additional Forum messages discovered by the member after this 7-day period, must be deleted and/or destroyed immediately upon their discovery.
- It was agreed that, other than this isolated incident, the Forum is functioning well.

Actions

- JD to update the Forum User Protocol and circulate to all Forum members

6. ICN Nominations Process Update

- JD confirmed that 2 nominations have been received to fill the 3 vacant positions on the ICN SG for the period 2022-2023.
- JD advised that the Nominations Sub-Committee will be reviewing the nominations at their meeting on Tuesday 12 October. In addition to reviewing the nominations received, the Sub-Committee will also decide whether the ICN SG membership should be reduced to 5 or if one of the original SG members should remain to keep the SG membership at 6.
- JD also advised that from 15 November 2021 she will be moving to a new position within the RTPI as Research Officer and will no longer be the ICN Network Manager from this date.
- SG members agreed that the SG should have 6 members and should retain one of the original SG members for the following reasons:
 - Assuming that the ICN will reinstate its annual conference in 2022, this will require all hands on deck, and the SG would benefit from having an additional member.
 - The ICN conference was cancelled in 2020 and 2021. The ICN SG appointed 3 new members who started in January 2021, none of whom have had any experience of organising an ICN conference.

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- If 2 new members are appointed and the SG is reduced to 5 members, this will mean that there will be no one left on the SG with experience of planning a conference.
- This will be exacerbated by the departure of JD as Network Manager and the appointment of a new Network Manager (who will also have had no experience of organising an ICN conference).
- The SG agreed that it would be desirable for the Nominations Sub-Committee to permit DW to remain on the SG for the term 2022-2023 to aid in the transition. DW would step down as Chair for this term and remain on the SG in an advisory capacity.
- DW agreed that she would be happy to remain to assist in the transition to a new SG.
- DW also commented that when reviewing the invite to join one of the other RTPI Committees, that mention was made that if you had been on a Committee for 6 years you were required to step down, but you would then be able to reapply after a minimum 1 year break. DW queried if this is the case for the ICN SG as well.
- The SG also agreed that the next meeting of the SG should include both current and new SG members, and that JD should also be present with the new Network Manager to assist in the transition.

Actions

- JD to present to the Nominations Sub-Committee next week on Tuesday, and will incorporate the comments from the SG about the benefits of DW being permitted to remain for an additional term.
- JD will contact the RTPI Governance team to query if a member can re-join the SG after serving for 6 years, provided they have a minimum 1 year break.

7. Welcome to new ICN members (including buddy system and Starting your own private practice PAN)

- SG members agreed that it would be desirable for new ICN members to be formally welcomed by a member of the SG to help them to understand the value of the group and to make them feel welcome.
- JD advised that this could be done in two ways:
 - Updating the ICN Welcome email sent out by the Network Manager to inform new members who current SG members are and how to get in touch with them with any queries. Due to GDPR it is not possible for new member email addresses to be circulated around the SG without the member's permission.
 - Notifying SG members about new additions to the ICN Discussion Forum in order that a formal welcome message can be sent to them via the Forum.
- HP suggested that we could also include an offer of a buddy system to inexperienced ICN members who would benefit from the advice and expertise of a mentor from the wider network.

Actions

- JD will circulate the current ICN template welcome email to SG members for comment on how it could be improved.

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- JD will update the welcome email based on SG member comments, provided the changes are GDPR compliant.

8. CPD for day to day business matters

- It was agreed that this item be combined with Item 9 below.

9. 2022 ICN Conference

- JD advised that from 2022, the location and venue planning for the ICN Conference will be undertaken by the RTPI events team. The content and speaker arrangements for the conference will remain with the ICN SG and Network Manager.
- JD confirmed that the 2022 conference will take place on 21 and 22 September, and that the intention is for the 2020 arrangements to be rolled over into 2022 in terms of location and venue. If the ICN SG wish to have a say in the location and venues for the conferences in 2023 onwards, they will need to ensure they inform the events team of their preferences well in advance to ensure the events team can take them into consideration.
- The SG agreed that the proposed conference date of 21 and 22 September 2022 is acceptable.
- The SG also agreed that the events team taking over the location and venue planning is a desirable outcome provided the ICN SG can continue to have a voice in these decisions.
- It was agreed that the SG should prepare a strategy to decide preferred conference locations for the next 3 to 4 years.
- DW suggested that we make a formal announcement to the ICN Network that the 2022 Conference will be happening, to increase morale within the network.
- It was agreed that the content of the 2022 conference will also need to be discussed and that it should include a session on day-to-day business matters.

Actions

- JD to liaise with the events team to ascertain when a formal announcement can be made to the ICN about the location of the 2022 conference (i.e. when the venues and dates have been confirmed).
- SG members to consider future conference locations for discussion at the next SG meeting

10. AOB (due notice having been given)

- Planning Resource
 - DW advised that the ICN had established a group subscription for 50 ICN members, which used to cost £65 per person. This cost has increased substantially over the years for the following reasons:
 - Planning Resource continue to increase the group subscription cost.
 - Planning Resource will not allow members who unsubscribe from the group to be replaced with new

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ICN members (to keep the group number at 50). As such, the group continues to dwindle, and the price for individual members continues to rise.

- DW advised that the consequence is that Planning Resource is becoming unaffordable, the ICN subscription price is fast aligning with the individual subscription price, and the group is continuing to decline in numbers for this reason.
 - DW queried if the RTPI could do anything to assist the SG to get a better deal for its members.
 - The SG agreed that Planning Resource is a commercial entity and, as such, their priority is to make a profit.
 - The SG agreed that there may not be anything the RTPI can do, but that it is worth asking the question.
- RTPI Committees
 - DW commented that she had received an invitation to join an RTPI committee. However, when she sought to investigate what the committees do and what they have achieved, she was unable to locate a copy of any agenda, minutes or annual reports on the RTPI website. The ICN minutes and annual reports are published on the ICN webpage, but this does not appear to be the case for the committees.
 - The SG agreed that this demonstrates a lack of transparency that should be raised.

Actions

- JD to ask colleagues if the RTPI has a relationship with Planning Resource and if any assistance could be provided to negotiate a more affordable outcome in terms of an ICN subscription.